



Briery Creek Lake 2007



Located just seven miles south of Farmville Virginia, Briery Creek Lake is an 845-acre impoundment owned by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and is within the Briery Creek Wildlife Management Area. Briery Creek Lake was impounded in 1986 and was stocked with Florida strain largemouth bass, northern strain largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish (shellcrackers), channel catfish, and crappie. Timber in the floodplain was left standing or was drumchopped resulting in an abundance of habitat for largemouth bass and crappie. Biologists hoped that the presence of the Florida strain largemouth bass and the complex habitat would produce a high quality largemouth bass fishery. The lake was opened to fishing on January 1, 1989 with an 18-inch minimum length limit and two fish/day creel limit on largemouth bass. Early production of largemouth bass was excellent and the regulation was changed to a 12 – 15 inch slot limit (5/day) on January 1, 1991 to allow anglers to harvest the abundant smaller bass. By the end of the 1990's, Briery Creek Lake became the premier trophy largemouth bass fishery in the state. Approximately 90 trophy largemouth bass are entered into the Angler Recognition Program each year and the state record was nearly broken again in April 2002 (16 pounds, 2 ounces). Anglers from across the state (and across the country) were coming to Briery each spring in search of a trophy largemouth bass. As the pressure on this fishery increased, the length limit was again changed to a 14-24 inch slot limit (no fish may be kept between 14 and 24 inches). The daily creel limit remained at 5 fish but only one fish can be longer than 24 inches.

The upper end of the slot limit is two inches larger than the minimum length for largemouth bass in Virginia's Angler Recognition Program. Anglers who catch fish that meet the minimum for this program (22 inches) but are within the protected slot may still participate in the ARP by having the fish certified by length (either verified by a witness or taking a photo of the fish next to a measuring tape).

Biologists sample Briery Creek Lake each spring with an electrofishing boat to monitor the fish populations (abundance, size structure, growth, survival). Largemouth bass are abundant, have a balanced size structure (meaning a good balance of young 'recruits' and adults), and grow fairly well. It takes largemouth bass about three years to reach 12 inches and about 8.5 years to reach 20 inches. The trophy slot limit has resulted in more 2-5 pound bass being caught; these fish should be the lakes future trophies. Although we collect several trophy largemouth bass each spring while electrofishing, it is not enough to truly monitor the quality of the trophy fishery.

Since 1999, biologists have also relied on creel survey data to provide information on the condition of the fish populations at the lake and it is here that we are able to monitor the trophy fishery. During creel surveys, anglers are interviewed as they leave the lake and asked things like how long they fished, what they caught, and what they harvested. It is also a great opportunity for biologists to get information on angler attitudes and opinions and determine what

they would like to see done with the fishery. The ability to talk to several hundred anglers each spring has been instrumental in fisheries management at Briery Creek Lake. Here are some highlights from the creel surveys conducted from 1999-2005:

- Fishing pressure is highest in March, April and May.
- Most anglers (75%) at Briery Creek Lake fish for trophy largemouth bass.
- Catch rates for largemouth bass are highest in the summer but the success on trophy largemouth bass is highest in the spring.
- On average, a trophy largemouth bass is caught for every 200 hours of fishing effort in the spring. This estimate goes up slightly in the rest of the year.
- About 75% of the trophy largemouth bass are caught in the spring.
- Bluegill and redear sunfish catch rates were highest from late April through June. Anglers had success at this time of year fishing with live bait such as worms and crickets.
- Bluegill and redear sunfish in the 8 – 11 inch range are common making Briery Creek Lake one of the better sunfish lakes in Southside Virginia.
- The crappie fishery is good but success is seasonal. Crappie tend to be caught mostly in the spring although some anglers can find them in the trees during the summer. Several 2-pound fish are caught each year but the average size of crappie harvested is about 11 inches.
- Anglers from across Virginia fish at Briery Creek Lake. Additionally, anglers from 10-15 states come to fish Briery Creek Lake each year.

Briery Creek Lake is often compared to nearby Sandy River Reservoir. In 2003 and 2004, summer sampling showed that Sandy River Reservoir had significantly higher abundances of young largemouth bass than Briery. From 2005-2007, the VDGIF has funded a research project to Virginia Tech to determine if this trend has continued, study factors that influence spawning success at the two lakes (and why they are different) and recommend management activities that assures that Briery Creek Lake continues to be Virginia's premier trophy largemouth bass fishery. Results of this study will be available in 2008.

Biologists recognize that Briery Creek Lake is an important resource not only to south-central Virginia, but to the entire state. Biologists will continue to sample the largemouth bass and sunfish populations each spring to collect information on abundance, growth, and condition. Creel surveys will continue to be conducted in the spring to collect information on angler effort catch, and harvest as well as angler attitudes and opinions. The new slot limit will be evaluated annually to assure that it is the most appropriate regulation for the continued production of trophy largemouth bass at Briery Creek Lake.

Access at Briery Creek Lake is excellent. There are two boat launch facilities (Routes 790 and 701) that have concrete ramps, courtesy piers, restroom facilities, and paved parking. A handicapped fishing pier is located at the end of Route 790 (near the dam). Gas motors up to 10 HP are permitted. The lake closes one-hour before sunrise and closes one-hour after sunset.

Briery Creek Lake Largemouth Bass 2006

